

# The Abdication of John Mitchell

by Jack Anderson



Martha and John Mitchell in a happy moment when he was Attorney General and close Nixon adviser. She rebelled after he quit to be campaign manager.



*Martha on telephone: Her unfettered calls to journalists and politicians night and day—anyone to scold or confide in—first brought her to national attention.*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**T**he sexual revolution notwithstanding, Republicans have proven this summer that the American people still appreciate a good old-fashioned family squabble—especially with John and Martha Mitchell as the combatants and President Nixon playing Dear Abby.

No scriptwriter for TV serials could have served up a hotter political opera. It all began suddenly at midnight with a phone call to UPI reporter Helen Thomas, a friendly ear to Martha over the last three years.

"I was surprised to get the call," Miss Thomas confided, but the veteran reporter told Martha to keep talking. To Miss Thomas' astonishment, Martha Mitchell began spouting political heresy. "I love my husband very much, but I'm not going to stand for all those dirty things going on," said Martha, adding that she would leave her husband if he did not leave the campaign.

Once labeled the Administration's secret weapon, Martha had suddenly turned her guns on the party that, heretofore, had relished her outspoken opinions. To another reporter Martha indirectly attacked President Nixon, himself, who had once cheered her from the sidelines. Sputtered Martha: "I doubt seriously if I want any of the current candidates in the White House."

### Honesty makes good copy

"It was my feeling," Miss Thomas told us, "that Martha often said publicly what she heard Administration officials, including her husband, say privately. That's what made her such good copy, her honesty. But those last phone calls were different."

Martha explained that she had been placed under heavy security guard. Calling herself a "political prisoner," she

charged that one guard had yanked her telephone out of the wall and that other guards had held her down on her bed while someone "stuck a needle in my behind."

Black and blue, Martha embarked on an escapade that began in California, peaked in Westchester County, New York, and finally concluded in Washington. The main events included: more late-night phone calls, jet flights from coast to coast, an interview in which Martha displayed her bandaged arms, and two crucial morning meetings between Mitchell and Nixon.

### Nixon sympathetic

The President was sympathetic. He pledged to stand by John and Martha. In 1962 his own wife, Pat, persuaded him to sign a written pledge that he would quit politics. It was a promise Nixon did not keep.

But Mitchell knew his role as campaign manager was clear: he had to get Martha out of the public spotlight. Another week on the front pages and the loquacious Martha could defeat President Nixon in November almost by herself. Mitchell told the President he would give Martha what she wanted—a full-time husband.

Thus, after 48 hours of deliberation, John and Martha were back together again. John agreed to leave his job as campaign manager, and Martha, apparently, agreed to relinquish her role as *enfant terrible* on the telephone. The press whimsically compared Mitchell to the Duke of Windsor. Headlined New York's *Daily News*: "MITCHELL QUILTS FOR WOMAN HE LOVES."

Two years ago when Martha Mitchell began her dawn-patrol telephone calls to journalists throughout the country, Walter Scott who heads the Personality

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## MITCHELL CONTINUED



*Lt. Jay Jennings, Vietnam vet, son of her first marriage, plans to become a lawyer.*

Parade page for this publication, explained that Martha was unhappy and might one day bring her too busy husband to heel.

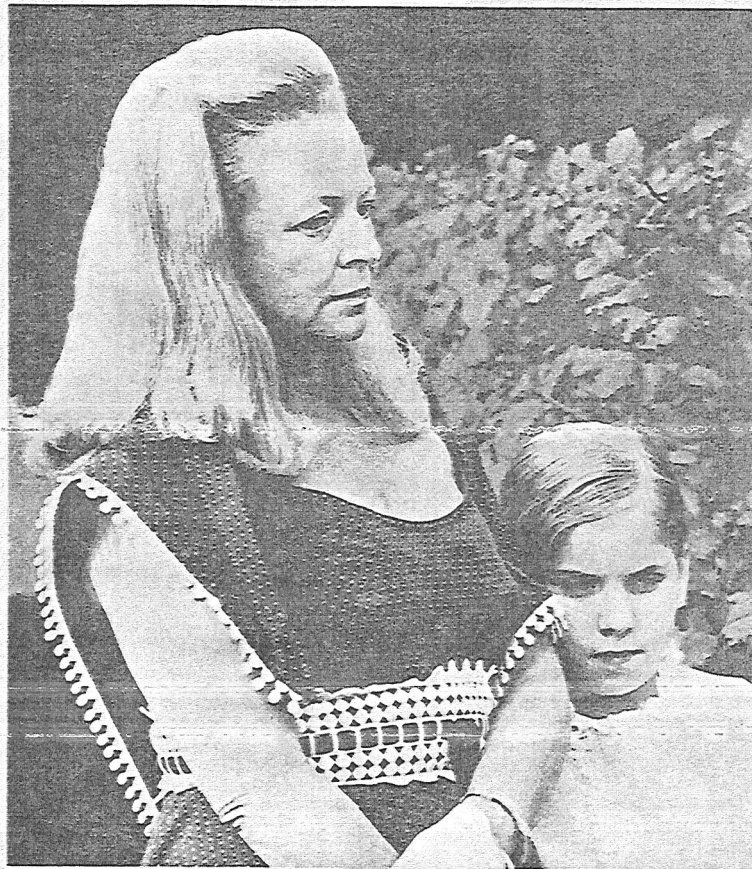
Scott employed a technique frequently used by the Central Intelligence Agency. He turned over to a trio of leading West Coast psychiatrists a file of clippings on Martha Mitchell. These clips contained her salty quotes: i.e., "The Vietnam war stinks. If it were not for Fulbright we'd be out of it." Also descriptions of her Arkansas background, her first marriage to Clyde Jennings, their son Jay, her subsequent Florida divorce and marriage to John Mitchell in Elkton, Md., on December 30, 1957. The file contained pretty nearly everything in print on Martha.

### **Prophetic analysis**

"We've been getting hundreds of questions per week about this lady," Scott explained. "I've talked to her on the phone several times. She always sounds frank and friendly, but I suspect she's much more deep and troubled than she sounds. Would you read these clips," Scott asked the psychiatrists, "and let me have your interpretation."

The group in turn questioned Scott for an hour, studied the clips, returned the next week with an analysis which

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*Martha with daughter Marty Mitchell, now 12. Few doubted former Attorney General Mitchell's sincerity when he placed wife and daughter above job.*

*As described by husband, 'My own guided missile'—except that it is unguided.*



*From left, Bureau of Narcotics Director John E. Ingersoll, President Nixon, and Attorney General Mitchell. On table*

*is part of \$4 million in illicit drugs taken in Detroit raid. Mitchell's fight against drugs and organized crime is laudable.*

## MITCHELL CONTINUED

turned out to be extraordinarily prophetic.

Thus on November 29, 1970, in answer to a reader's question, "Why does Martha Mitchell call newspaper reporters at outlandish hours of the night and from strange places?", Scott responded with:

"Psychiatrists say Mrs. Mitchell is obviously unhappy with her state in life. Her telephone calls to reporters are, symbolically, cries of help to her husband. She wants the Attorney General to pay some attention to her. By phoning newsmen, what she is saying to her husband is, 'I am capable of making great trouble for you. Pay some attention to me. Spend some time with me. Do not dismiss me. I am capable of wielding considerable power. Here is an example.' Then she makes one of her phone calls, and the Attorney General in response has to dismiss her facetiously as 'My own guided missile'—except that it is unguided."

For nearly three years Martha delighted Republican partisans with her

spirited tirades against Administration foes. She called political demonstrators "Liberal Communists." She demanded that *The Arkansas Gazette* "crucify" Sen. William Fulbright. She claimed that professors and educators "were totally responsible for the sins of our children."

In response, hundreds of letters—nine to one in her favor—began to pour daily into her husband's offices at the Justice Department. Martha started making speeches, granting interviews, appearing on the covers of national magazines.

### Crank mail pours in

One indicator of her meteoric rise in popularity: she began receiving as much crank mail as Sen. Ted Kennedy. For Christmas someone sent her a decomposed rat surrounded with holly. Such incidents frightened Martha, and her security was tightened.

But, all told, Martha was ecstatic. George Gallup reported that 76 percent of the American people knew who she was—three times as many people recognized her than recognized State Secretary William Rogers.

But Martha's sunburst of publicity

went into sudden eclipse when her husband left the Justice Department last February to become the President's campaign manager. The orderly, disciplined life of Cabinet wife suddenly turned into disarray. Her husband also became involved in the headlines—first the ITT affair, then the break-in of the Democratic Party headquarters.

John spent long hours in the office cooking up political strategy, not realizing that the most potent political stewpot was bubbling at home. Finally, a neglected Martha blew off steam—enough, as it turned out, to keep John in his own kitchen for some time to come.

But Mitchell's abdication may be more a blessing in disguise than a disaster to the Nixon campaign. An examination of his public record reveals that Mitchell was an abrasive campaign manager and a partisan Attorney General.

As the 1968 campaign strategist, Mitchell was more suited to Wall Street than a political campaign. Although he was inexperienced in national politics, he still knew where the power was. His relentless pursuit of money and support

in 1968 lost votes. Ahead by 16 percentage points in the national polls at the beginning, Nixon won by less than one percent of the total vote.

However narrow the victory, it was enough to persuade Nixon that Mitchell should serve as his Attorney General and, again, as campaign manager. But he got Nixon's 1972 campaign off to an inauspicious start. He refused to disclose the names of thousands of Republicans who contributed \$10 million to the campaign just ahead of the legal deadline which hereafter will require full disclosure.

### Political strategist

Even as Attorney General, Mitchell insisted upon retaining his headdress as the President's top political chieftain. Mitchell was a principal architect of Nixon's so-called Southern strategy, carefully courting Sen. Strom Thurmond during the 1968 convention. As Thurmond's reward, Mitchell persuaded the President to appoint Clement Haynsworth and Harrold Carswell to

the Supreme Court. In an unprecedented move, the Senate rejected one after another.

Mitchell continued to play partisan politics as the nation's top law officer. This raises the question of whether the campaign manager should be in charge of justice, even though there is a precedent for this. President Eisenhower appointed Herbert Brownell and John F. Kennedy named his brother Robert.

The first week Mitchell took office he permitted his department to drop an antitrust case against El Paso Natural Gas, which had paid the former Nixon-Mitchell law firm more than \$770,000 over a six-year period. The action was so blatantly political that the Supreme Court, in an unusual move, retook jurisdiction of the El Paso case.

Mitchell sought to delay school integration in Mississippi and oppose crosstown busing at Charlotte, N.C., for political reasons. The Supreme Court

again slapped him down—both times.

Mitchell sought to stop *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from publishing the Pentagon Papers. The Supreme Court ruled against him, six to three.

### Fight on drugs and crime

Nixon campaigned hard on the theme that doubling the conviction rate was the best way to stop the rise of crime. But a Justice Department report reveals that there has been a drastic decrease in the conviction rate since Mitchell became Attorney General.

To his credit, however, Mitchell let his crimebusters loose on organized crime and drug pushers. Compared to his predecessors, Mitchell's record in these areas is laudable.

The consensus view of Mitchell as public figure: He was blunt, relentless, often heavy-handed. But privately, his wife Martha knew a different man. She called him "warm and cuddly."